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The Complete Guide To Writing Science Fiction: Volume One - First Contact (The Complete Guide To Writing Series)



Synopsis

Dragon Moon Press follows its highly successful Complete Guide to Writing Fantasy series with a comprehensive writer's guide on science fiction. The book leads the writer from the pitfalls and clichs of a first story to selling and promoting a novel, and the writing life beyond. Topics in this guide range from the history of SF to alien creation, world building, space travel, and future medicine - a perfect reference and writing guide for someone wishing to write science fiction. The Complete Guide to Writing Science Fiction is written by established professionals, contributors from other DMP guides, and up-and-coming talents: Jeanne Allen Bud Sparhawk Piers Anthony Michele Acker Milena Benini Bob Nailor Orson Scott Card Michael McRae Ian Irvine Tina Morgan Wil McCarthy Darin Park Simon Rose Kim Richards ...and introducing Carol Hightshoe

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Customer Reviews

The aspiring science fiction writer who starts at the beginning of this book will build understanding and a strong foundation of knowledge. While this by no means ensures success in a very tough business, it can give her a distinct advantage. I have read, heard, studied, and practiced all of these techniques for years. But I still found new truths and a wealth of new insights in the words. Broken into short chapters, written in simple (but not simplistic) language, the book follows a logical progression. Three sections organize the material into five parts, plus appendices. Part I focuses on defining the history and parameters of the genre. Part II delves deep into basic scientific principles, word building, and aerospace technology. Part III covers crafting and revision and Part IV specialty

sub-genres. Part V addresses publishing, marketing, and the writing life. It's important for the writer to understand the multiple sub-genres and techniques used in each to create good stories, as well as to target marketing efforts. Having a single source for very detailed biochemistry, genetics and evolutionary biology, physics, and astronomy is much easier than unearthing it from other places. I recommend this as the first book for new science fiction writers to buy and see it as the last one those of us slogging through the process will need. Carole Ann Moleti writes review and commentary for Tangent Online, The Fix, Noneuclidean Café and most recently for Vision: A Resource for Writers.

A comprehensive, deftly edited, 311-page 'how to' instruction guide for writing in the science fiction genre and any of its many subgenres, "The Complete Guide To Writing Science Fiction: Volume One" is a collection of superbly presented essays and articles by knowledgeable and successful writers ranging from Piers Anthony, to Orson Scott Card, to Tina Morgan. Beginning with Darin Park's 'Timeline: A History of Science Fiction', there are specific chapters dealing with the science and technology in science fiction, world building, the creating of aliens, the use of humor and drama, writing graphic novels in the genre, and even what to do with your science fiction short story or novel once it is written. Whether an aspiring writer yearning to break into science fiction, or even an experienced author with some publication credits in the genre, "The Complete Guide To Writing Science Fiction" will prove to be invaluable reading and instructive reference.

I think this is a great book for a writer who's interested in learning how to write Science Fiction. It has all the nuts and bolts needed to get an aspiring writer started in writing for the genre. I enjoy reading Sci-Fi, but have always been afraid of trying to write it. Science is not my strong suit and I don't aspire to wasting my time or being a laughingstock. They've crammed so much information into this book that it's hard for me to do it justice. It covers the mechanics of writing such as: characterization, plot, POV, pacing and so on. And yes I have read that information in other books, but it ties in with what it takes to write Sci-Fi and that's what makes it so helpful. I liked it that the book gives out some information on black holes, time travel, wormholes and other facts or speculation. It describes the many subgenres and what is necessary for creating alien life. With World Building I create my own world for my story and its characters. World building helps me to make my story believable. I read how important technology is too. I think that's the part that's always scared me the most about writing Sci-Fi. This book is so great because it walked me through each step of what it takes to write Science Fiction. It's a wonderful guide for a genre that is both complex

and sometimes difficult to write. No, it won't write the book for me, but it does give me some basic tools to start my journey with.

Edited by Dave A. Law and Darin Park (sorry, the name of the book was too big to include the editors into the title). I received this book from EDGE/Tesseract, which is also in league with Dragon Moon Press, who happened to be the publisher of this particular book. On a side note to this, they also have a couple volumes of a guide to writing fantasy, which may be of interest to those of you who are not into SF. I'm going to do this review in two ways. First I'm going to talk about the book as a whole, second I'm going to address each article individually, and third I'll end with a conclusion. Here goes: This book should be on your required reading list for genre-related non-fiction. If you write science fiction, get this book because it will help you in so many different ways, especially if you're just starting out in the SF field. This book covers everything from the early history of SF to sub-genres, creating believable aliens to getting your science right, writing to editing, and submitting to the life of a published author. In a lot of ways it is too much subject matter for one book, but I imagine that Dragon Moon is intending to do with this what they did with their guide to fantasy--multiple volumes--which would help expand upon the ideas that were intentionally left alone. In short, this is one of the most useful books for writers of SF that I have read since Orson Scott Card's how-to book on SF & F. It's definitely worth more than the \$24.95 USD price. Edit: I forgot to mention that the back of the book includes an extensive collection of resources that I have found remarkably useful. It includes websites, publishers, and all of the works that were cited within the articles, among other things. Now for the criticism, which is sort of bad criticism and simple observational criticism which is neutral. There were some articles that had spelling and grammar errors, though the vast majority of the book was generally perfect. Also, it seems as though there was a printing problem throughout the book that I can't imagine being an editorial issue. The italicized capped "N" was consistently replaced with an italicized capped "I" with a little dot under it. This has to be some sort of printing fluke. It's hard to miss otherwise. Other than that, and what will be mentioned in the individual article discussions, there little wrong with this guide. With authors like Orson Scott Card, Wil McCarthy, Piers Anthony, Michele Acker, and Kim Richards in the table of contents you can see how good this guide really is. The reason I'm doing the articles last is because you may not want to read my take on the individual articles, since overall the book is really awesome. But, in case you want to know what I thought of them individually, here they are: Part One: Defining 1. Time Line: A History of Science Fiction by Darin Park This article gives a very, very, very brief history of SF. I did learn a few things about the history of SF, but I think the weakest

part of the article--other than some grammar and spelling errors--is that it is too broad. If another volume shows up I would really like to see certain aspects of SF's history expanded upon. It's a good article for the ill-versed reader, but it is very much glossing over the vast history of SF.

2. Searching For the Definitive Definition of Science Fiction by Jeanne Allen Addressing the age-old question of "what is Science Fiction"? The great thing about this article is that it paints the argument perfectly. What is science fiction? Well, how about, what isn't science fiction? It's impossible to come up with a definitive definition, essentially. Darn good article.

3. Science First, Fiction Second: That's Science Fiction by Bob Nailor Nailor does a good job here discussing some of the myths in science fiction and basically pointing out that if you intend to write SF, even if you don't know the science and you're simply making something up that can't happen anyway (such as FTL travel), you still need to present it in a way that works. Technobabble used appropriately makes your writing seem effective, etc. He also uses some well known SF writers (Heinlein, Asimov, etc.) to support his point.

4. The Many Faces of Science Fiction: Sub-Genres by Kim Richards The title says it all basically. This is another of the articles that could do with expanding, especially on the subject of the blurred lines between different genres. Still a good introduction, but I think that sub-genres are vastly more complex than this.

Part Two: Building

1. Technology and Science Fiction by Wil McCarthy Basically, if you want to write SF, you have to get the science right. McCarthy basically says what anyone else who writes SF seriously will tell you. Readers will drop you like a hat if you create a technology that is absolutely idiotic and unbelievable, within limits of course (readers are likely to accept that a FTL ship works, but only because that's just a general acceptance in SF). McCarthy does a good job going into the use of ideas and researching. His methods might not be for everyone, but he still provides you with a unique insight into how important the science in SF really is.

2. World Building by Kim Richards The simplest way to explain this is that it's fantasy world building, only from an SF approach. Aliens instead of goblins and elves, alien cultures instead of medieval countries, etc. Depending on the type of SF you intend to write this could be a hit or miss. I found it useful because I do like designing alternate worlds, and it did give a glossed over version of dealing with alien creations.

3. Alien Creation Michael McRae Just read the title and you'll know what this is about. McRae does go into this by making a point that your aliens don't have to be human, but they have to have a human element to them. If something is too alien it will be impossible to translate it to an audience of people who are human. So, even if your aliens have twelve arms and three mouths, you have to make it so the audience can identify with it. A really good article here for anyone wanting to make aliens.

4. Navigating Your Way Through Outer Space: Facts, Theories, and Conjecture by Jeanne Allen Another very brief article, but I think this is still

effective. It should be expanded though, and I hope that Dragon Moon does so. Allen discusses the vastness of space--stars, galaxies, and beyond--while pointing out how harsh space is. Everything from radiation to the effects of zero gravity on the human body, methods of creating artificial gravity to methods of space travel--real and otherwise--and even the enhancement of humans via artificial means. A good introduction to everything, and very valuable. 5. I Don't Know That Bug-Eyes

Monster From Adam: Cliches In SF by Milena Benini A discussion of the cliches in SF. Really it's impossible for this to be any more limited because there are so many cliches in SF anyway.

However, it serves as an example of the types of things that have been done to death already and what you need to do to make sure that any cliché elements you use come off as more creative and interesting. Part Three: Crafting 1. Bringing Characters To Life by Tina Morgan Basically a brief

discussion on how to make your characters more lifelike. Giving them little habits and such to make them seem real. We've heard it before, but I think the basics of writing tend to be left out of genre specific books for writers. Now genre writers have a place they can go to get most, if not all, of the necessary info. 2. Attack of the Monster Plot: Ideas, Settings, and Plots by Milena Benini Another basic look to an important element of writing. It was a decent article, I thought, and it did manage to help me really think about some of the issues I'm having with a novel I'm currently working on. 3.

Science Fiction As Western Union by Orson Scott Card Card talks in some detail about some things you shouldn't do with fiction in general: don't intentionally send a religious message or preach to your audience, etc. He raises some good points and defends his position by stating that he has written stories from various viewpoints, including non-religious viewpoints, even though he himself is a religious man. 4. Slash & Burn: When To Make Your Manuscript Bleed by Tina Morgan Another basic approach to a common fiction element. This discusses all the little things within editing that you should be aware of. Rules like "show don't tell" and "don't be redundant" come into play here.

It's a good article and certainly worth the read. Again, this is basic though. It works, but you'll want to go look for more expansive takes on some of the points made if you don't already know about them.

Part Four: Specializing 1. Laugh Lines by Bud Sparhawk Humor...as in knock-knock jokes and other funnies. Okay, not really, but Sparhawk goes into the uses of humor in SF writing, whether it be within a serious work or a work that is intentionally being funny (like what Douglas Adams did). I think there could have been better humorous examples provided by Sparhawk, but I think he still gets his point across. 2. Going Where Others Have Gone Before...And Want To Go Again by Carol Hightshoe This article discusses Fan Fiction. The interesting thing about it is that when I started reading it I expected to see only things related to FF, except Hightshoe goes even further by addressing shared-world series (such as Star Wars and Star Trek). This is a really good article that

also delves into the issues of copyright infringement in FF (true FF I mean, not shared-world stuff). You might be interested to know that Lucas is one of the few franchise owners that actually encourages FF and Fan Films provided they follow some guidelines (no slash, and length limitations). More reasons to love Lucas I suppose. This was a fascinating read even though I have no intention of writing FF or writing within a shared-world (though I imagine I may try it one day).

3. Writing Graphic Novels and Other Forms of Sequential Art by Dave A. Law This article was partially useless to me and partially interesting. First, it's useless to me because I have no real desire to get into graphic novels. This doesn't mean the article is bad, what it means is that it just doesn't provide information that I really intend to use. For someone who is interested in this field it will provide some valuable information, especially if you're interested but know very little about the field. It's a good introduction to how things work, particularly on the publishing side.

4. Science Fiction For Younger Readers Aged Eight to Twelve by Simon Rose This has to be the first article I have ever seen that addresses SF for kids and young adults. I've seen far too many ones that take on fantasy, but never on SF. The interesting thing about this is that much of what is required to make SF for adults work ends up not being required in the same manner for kids. Science doesn't have to be explained too much, it just has to be believable to kids, and since kids are more likely to accept something as believable in a book it's not too complicated to make SF stories for kids. I enjoyed this article a lot.

Part Five: Publishing and Beyond

1. So You've Finished Your Short Story/Novel, Now What? Michele Acker Everything from conventions to workshops, markets to agents, etc. Everything that takes place between having completed your story to getting it published, and the means to do so. Acker also delves into the different types of publishers (print, POD, electronic, etc.) and talks with actual agents and editors on some very important subjects. Very useful article here.

2. The Art & Science of Book Promotion by Ian Irvine Those of you looking for a speculative fiction look into the world of promoting your newly published book should look no further than here. Irvine goes into detail on the various methods by which you can promote your book, while also addressing how the publisher may or may not help promote you. I learned a lot from this article and, in the end, I still want to be a writer. I can deal with having to work my [...] off.

3. The Writing Life by Piers Anthony What can you say about this article other than saying that this shows the grim reality of what it's like to be a writer before and after being successful (if you are successful)? That's about all you can say really. It ain't an easy life. The conclusion is: buy this book. Period. Okay, well don't if you don't want to, but you should really consider it if you're a writer and want to work with SF. It's an awesome book! Plain and simple!

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